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LEGAL DESIGN LAB
Stanford Law School

Process Mapping for Emergency Rental Assistance

What actually happens when a tenant or a landlord in your community applies to receive emergency rental assistance (ERA)? What are the problems they face, how do they connect with the ERA program, and what happens as they navigate through the ERA process? What are service providers doing behind the scenes to get available funds to households efficiently and equitably? Process mapping is a way for cities and their partners to clearly document how the local ERA process works and how to improve it to deliver better results for everyone.

This worksheet describes how to develop a step-by-step process map for emergency rental assistance in your community. Key topics include: how to get the right stakeholders to contribute effectively to the mapping process; how to transform your map into helpful materials for tenants, landlords, service providers and others; and how to use the mapping process to identify opportunities for strengthening the ERA process and other eviction prevention services and supports.

This resource was developed by the National League of Cities and the Stanford Legal Design Lab based on partnerships with the five city participants of the Emergency Rental Assistance Technical Assistance Program. Additional resources for local governments implementing or refining an ERA program can be found at nlc.org/resource/emergency-rental-assistance-toolkit.

Developing an Emergency Rental Assistance Process Map

Use this step-by-step guide to create a master ERA process map, and then to synthesize the map into specific materials and content that can drive improvements in service delivery and policy.

1 Identify and Invite the Mapping Stakeholders

Who knows how evictions and the provision of ERA play out in your region? These are the stakeholders to invite to a mapping event. These sessions may be in-person or on a virtual call. Think about having fewer than 20 people at an event. If you have more than 20 stakeholders, consider holding a series of mapping events.

Some stakeholders to invite to the mapping event from your local eviction prevention network include:

- ERA administrators, managers, program officers and others in charge of the program's operations
- Front-line ERA staff who interact with clients and the general public
- Other housing and eviction prevention service providers who interact with the same clients and the ERA program, including non-municipal and community-based organizations
- Past clients, tenants, landlords and property managers
- Court staff or judicial officers, particularly those who have experience in referring people to ERA or who interact with the ERA's data systems
- Tenant advocates or community navigators who have experience representing people through the eviction or ERA application processes

Reach out to the individuals from these groups to invite them to participate in the mapping event. The invitation can be framed in the following way:

> “We are making a comprehensive map of how ERA currently works for tenants, landlords and housing service providers in our area. We want to make sure your voice is heard so we can see the ERA process from your perspective and flag opportunities for improvements. We'll be using our ERA process map to create user-friendly guides and an agenda for service and policy changes. Could you plan to attend and contribute to this collaborative and interactive mapping session?”

ESTABLISH A CORE FACILITATION TEAM

Cities and their partners should ensure there is a core team assigned to lead the facilitation of the event and synthesis of the maps. It will likely take at least three people to facilitate the mapping event so there is thorough documentation, broad participation, detailed conversation and effective synthesis. Think about inviting people to the core team who are detail-oriented, have excellent note-taking skills, and can empathetically see the process from different points of view.

2 Set up the Mapping Workspace

Before you can get started filling out the ERA process map, it is important to reach an agreement on what the map will look like, how it will be organized, and what the main sections will be for people to fill out. This includes deciding on the map's phases, format, and stakeholder zones or “lanes.”

DEFINE THE PROCESS PHASES TO MAP

The first thing to establish for mapping will be the phases that a person goes through in a journey through the ERA process. This includes the presenting problem, solutions, detours, and, hopefully, a resolution. Think of it like a long, horizontal timeline that tells the story of how an individual becomes in need of rental assistance, how they come to seek out resources, what service providers do in response, and what happens along that person's journey.

Lay the phases out chronologically and horizontally on your mapping surface. These phases might include:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Before a problem arises	As the problem begins	Outreach or connection to services	Application & processing to obtain assistance	Possible resolution through services	Problem escalates to court	Moving forward

Details about what is happening during each of these stages of the ERA process will be added during the mapping event.

For each phase, participants should seek to capture how the ERA process works for multiple scenarios, including "the ideal path" — the scenario in which relevant parties are able to find the necessary services, get help, and potentially establish a stronger landlord-tenant relationship — as well as cases in which things go wrong. The latter might include situations in which people are not aware of or do not apply for rental assistance, face greater housing insecurity, and possibly go through the court system for an eviction proceeding. Alternatively, mapping also should consider what happens when a tenant or landlord seeks and applies for rental assistance, but faces additional challenges or "detours" along their journey, such as missed deadlines, unresponsive parties, or the denial of their application.

DEFINE THE STAKEHOLDER ZONES

The second thing to establish as part of the mapping surface are the different stakeholders' zones. To define these zones, identify the key users, providers, or other stakeholders performing actions within the ERA timeline. The main clusters of stakeholders should each get their own horizontal section or stripe on the map. Think of it as a series of "swim lanes" that will show what each of these clusters of people are doing at a certain phase of the timeline.

Key stakeholder zones will include:

- Tenants having issues making rent
- ERA service providers
- Landlords or property managers
- Other service providers (e.g., legal aid, housing counselors, court staff)

BUILD THE BLANK PROCESS MAP

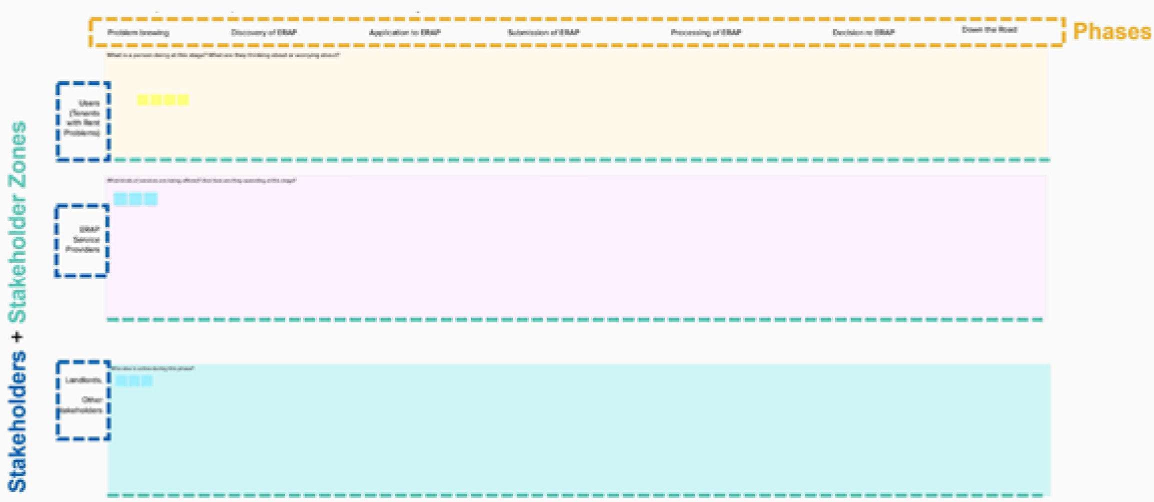
With the phases, format and stakeholders defined, facilitators should build the blank map (or "mapping workspace") that participants will contribute to. Your resulting map structure should look like a long horizontal timeline, divided by some basic phase titles and separating lines, and a series of different colored backgrounds for the stakeholders' swim lanes or zones.

If the mapping event will take place in-person, consider creating a physical workspace on a whiteboard or large poster, and plan to have participants contribute ideas and details by writing on sticky notes. This interactive element can lead to more creative and engaging sessions.

If the mapping event will take place virtually, you may want to leverage digital whiteboard platforms such as Miro or Mural for the most collaborative and immersive experience. Shared documents or slides can also be used, but likely will not yield the same level of participation and engagement.

TIP: Make sure the facilitation team is very familiar with the horizontal and vertical categories. At the mapping event, you will be responsible for leading participants through populating the map and making sure participants' insights and observations end up in the correct locations.

Example of a Blank ERA Process Map



Source: Stanford Legal Design Lab

3 Hold a Mapping Event

Once the structure of the process map has been established and key players have been identified, invite those stakeholders to a mapping event.

This session can take place either virtually or in-person. In-person events often yield the most interactive and collaborative results, but virtual events may enable facilitators to engage a broader range of stakeholders.

Individual mapping events should be scheduled for at least 45 minutes and no more than 90 minutes. It will be difficult to capture all the necessary details in less time, and energy may begin to fade after 90 minutes. If the group runs out of time, you can schedule supplemental mapping sessions or follow-ups for more detail-oriented mapping, including virtual convenings as needed.

TIP: Consider offering a virtual participation option for in-person mapping events if a critical stakeholder is unable to attend. Virtual participants should be encouraged to join by video call with their camera on, they should be able to see the physical workspace that in-person participants are contributing to, and an in-person facilitator should be specifically assigned to ensure that the voices of virtual participants are being heard.

MAKE A FACILITATION PLAN

Members of the core mapping team should each be assigned specific facilitation roles. This includes:

1. **Lead Interviewer:** This person will ask questions of the group, prompting discussion, guiding participants to provide greater detail, and signaling when it is time to move on to a different topic or a new phase of the ERA timeline.
2. **Notetaker:** Even though participants will be contributing to the map workspace directly in real-time, it is important to have someone focused on capturing notes in greater detail in order to identify knowledge gaps or areas that might require additional clarification. The notetaker also can document cross-cutting issues that are relevant for multiple stages or zones.
3. **Timekeeper and Facilitator:** This person should help the Lead Interviewer keep the group on track and moving through the process map based on the time allotted. They should ensure lively, equitable discussion by paying attention to who is participating and asking pointed questions or otherwise creating space for participation by quieter stakeholders. They can also assist people with contributing to a virtual mapping workspace.

SPARK COLLABORATION AT THE EVENT

The Lead Interviewer should be prepared to guide the stakeholder group through the entire process map, allocating time to prioritize fruitful discussion or to focus on problem areas. They should kick off discussion at the beginning of the ERA process timeline, and then slowly work across the map phase-by-phase, prompting participants to explain how the ERA program operates in each stage, for each stakeholder.

Facilitators should rely on a set of probing questions to uncover specifics about how the ERA process plays out in real-world cases and to spur discussion around possible hurdles or detours in the process. These questions might include:

- What is your department or organization doing at this point in the process?
- What happens next?
- Tell me more. What exactly happens?
- What if that goes wrong? Then what would you do?
- What is the experience like for the tenant at this point in the process? What about the landlord?
- Are any other stakeholders or organizations taking action at this point? If so, what does their involvement look like?
- Where are there frustrations or problems now? What can go wrong at this stage?
- Do you have any ideas for improvements?

While the Lead Interviewer generally guides the conversation, other members of the core mapping team can co-facilitate by prompting with additional questions or picking up on important threads for more focused discussion.

Participants should contribute to a shared map, either in-person or virtually, and take turns adding details based on their expertise or involvement in the process at different stages. Those details, actions and red flags can be captured on sticky notes or virtual sticky notes and added to the map under the relevant stages and in the appropriate stakeholder zones.

TIP: If no one can answer a question the facilitator asks, make note that the core mapping team should reach out to additional stakeholders at a later date to contribute those details or to clarify.

At the end of the mapping event, the core team will have a decision to make: Do you need to host additional sessions to get more stakeholder input? Or do you have enough information from the event to complete the map, even if you might have to fill in some gaps through email follow-up or phone calls?

If the team feels that it doesn't have a clear understanding of all steps in the process or the experiences of key stakeholders, you should plan an additional mapping event, perhaps only with the relevant stakeholders included or to drill down on a particular stage.

4 Clean up the Master Map

At the end of the mapping session, the facilitation team will likely have a robust but unwieldy map. It will be full of details, clumps of overlapping sticky notes, and some fuzzy spots where you need more details. Your team tried to capture and organize during the live event, but inevitably the map will be too busy to be useable for most stakeholders and will need to be organized.

PRESERVE THE ORIGINAL MAP

Take clear, legible photographs or screenshots of the map that results from your event. These photos should be shared with all participants so they have a copy of the original, and to offer them a more immediate "payoff" for attending the event. Facilitators can also encourage participants to submit any edits, additions or clarifications as the team works to finalize the map into more useable formats.

ORGANIZE AND DISTRIBUTE THE MASTER MAP

After preserving the original map, the core mapping team should consolidate, streamline and reformat the notes to create a cleaner and more useable version of the master map.

This can be done by creating a duplicate of the physical map and reorganizing the notes, though at this stage it may be more functional to transition physical maps to a virtual whiteboard format by leveraging tools such as Miro or Mural.

Items to consider when cleaning up the map include:

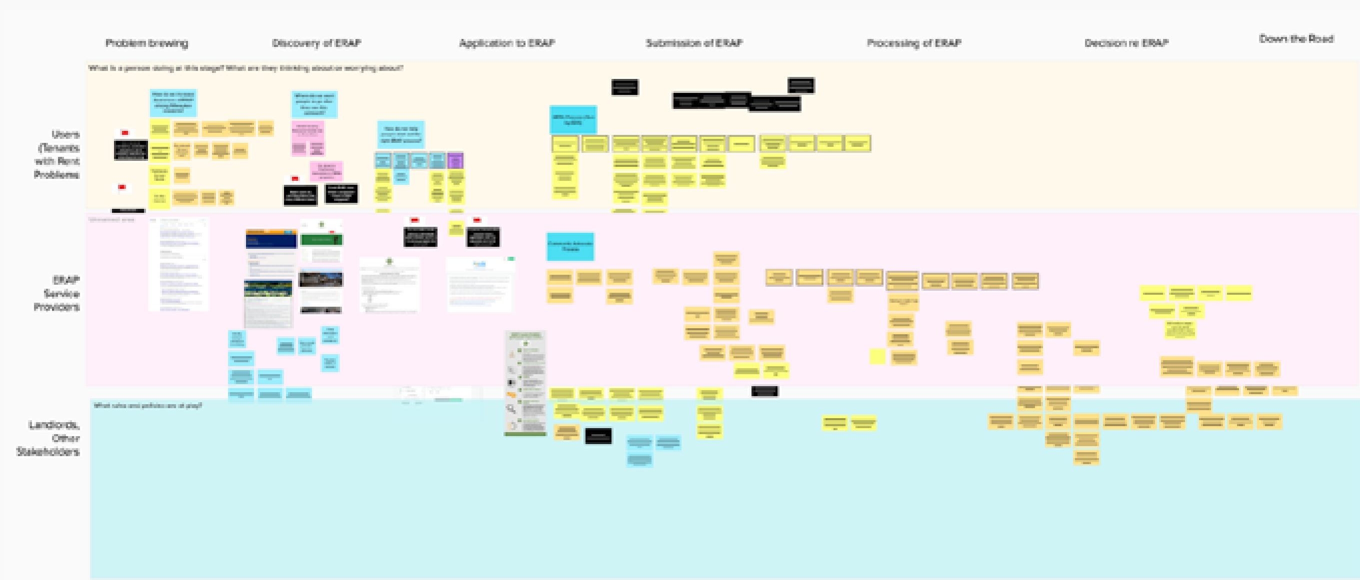
- Retain the timeline structure and zones for different stakeholders
- Focus on synthesizing the notes and individual details to make the map more readable
- Create clusters of notes to capture common themes or action areas

- Ensure that all actions are sequenced chronologically from left to right
- Designate detours, hurdles or areas for improvement in the ERA process by organizing them in a slightly different area on the map or in a different color
- Identify knowledge gaps about steps in the process and conduct the necessary follow-up to answer any open questions
- Be conscious of whether any new phases or stakeholder lanes were identified during the mapping event and adjust the underlying map structure accordingly
- Ensure that all notes are clear and readable

Once the map has been organized and streamlined, the core mapping team should reach out to participants and other stakeholders in the local eviction prevention network to share the cleaned-up master map in multiple formats. Encourage participants to provide feedback on any ways in which this information could be visualized, presented, or otherwise transformed into materials that would be useful for their work.

TIP: Share the entire map as a single image or file (e.g., PDF or PNG) that is large enough for people to zoom in and read the detailed notes. Additionally, consider providing screenshots or photos of sections of the map in which you have zoomed in on specific areas, either in a similar file format or collected on a series of slides in a PowerPoint deck.

Example of a Completed ERA Process Map



Source: Stanford Legal Design Lab for the City of Milwaukee, WI

5 Create Simplified Materials and Content

Though useful for visualizing an ERA process in the big picture, the master map may provide too much information for many users and service providers. Instead, the core mapping team should use the master map to make more specific visuals, slide decks, and lists that will be more functional and user-friendly for stakeholders' specific objectives.

Possible content resulting from the map might include: public-facing guides or process overviews to be used in outreach and communication materials; service maps; training materials for service providers; or a consolidated list of action items and necessary improvements.

Ultra-simple guide for tenants or landlords

An ultra-simple version of the process map could be presented on the ERA program webpage, included on flyers handed out by courts or social service providers, or posted anywhere residents might be seeking assistance.

This visualization could be as simple as four or five blocks corresponding to different phases in the process, laid out as a timeline of what program applicants should expect. Think of this as a high-level, bird's-eye view of the main phases of the process. The goal is to present the titles of the main phases, and define the primary task or most significant action item within each phase.

Example of an Ultra-Simple Guide for Tenants or Landlords

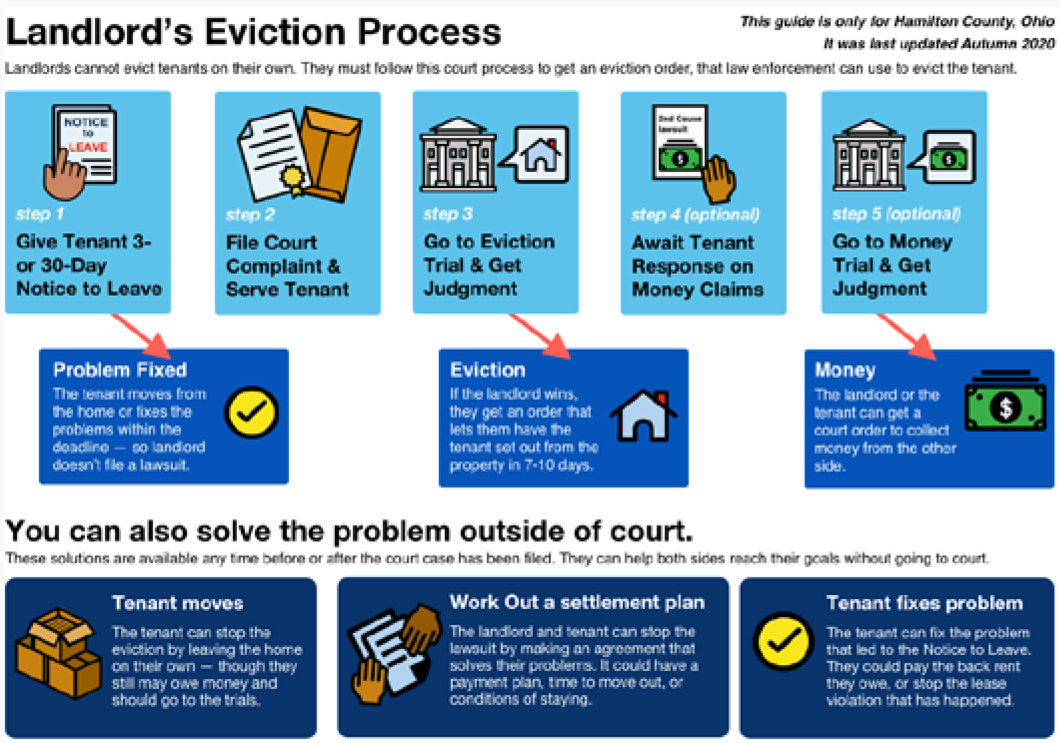
Source: Stanford Legal Design Lab for the City of Milwaukee, WI

DIY service map for tenants or landlords

This user-facing map is more detailed than the ultra-simple guide. It should include information in a greater level of detail, specifically tailored to the perspective of the landlord or tenant. This representation can also flag possible detours or mistakes, instead of just the "ideal path" of how everything could go right.

This map can also be distributed at service points or on websites to the public. But it should largely be used in an interaction between a service provider and a landlord or tenant to explain the different paths the person might take and what outcomes they might reach. Think of it like a board game that a user can follow along and use to navigate the process.

Example of a DIY Service Map



Source: Stanford Legal Design Lab for Hamilton County, OH

Step-by-step text for websites and fliers

The step-by-step content of a complete map also can be laid out in a numbered list form. This can be shown on websites, fliers, or other places where a person might be seeking information on how to receive rental assistance. This format is particularly useful for presenting concise information on platforms accessed on a mobile device.

Service provider training materials

In addition to user-facing content, the process map can also serve as a foundation for resources for onboarding new members to the ERA team or other service providers (e.g., court or city agency staff, legal aid lawyers, housing counselors and community navigators).

The mapping structure is well-suited for slide decks or training materials depicting how the local ERA program works. Screenshots of the phases depicted in the map can be complemented by additional details on each stage and what the users or the service providers are doing in each phase. This can help other providers better understand how each phase currently works.

Agenda list

The core team should capture the problems, frustrations, and recommendations that emerged during the mapping events and subsequent synthesis by the team. Write these out as a numbered list to share with the network of service providers and staff working to prevent evictions in your region or city. Consider what the process map has revealed about possible service, technology and policy changes that could improve efficiency, experience and quality. Group the agenda points into near-term and long-term actions based on how feasible or resource-intensive the tasks seem to be.

DISTRIBUTE AND CONTINUE TO REFINE MAP-BASED RESOURCES

The team should distribute materials resulting from the mapping process to mapping event participants, any additional service providers and the general public. Consider how best to deliver helpful content in user-friendly formats to tenants, landlords and advocates who can use the various representations of the process map as they try to understand and navigate the ERA process.

Cities and their partners also should provide stakeholders and users of these resources with a clear process for updating the map or for offering feedback on the resulting materials. Participants should feel comfortable reaching out with new information or requests so the process map and materials continue to be accurate and useable. Consider using an online form or email to obtain feedback and updates.

Suggested Resources

Government agencies and service designers have created a rich set of resources on how to create and deploy process maps. Additional ideas and guidance are available from the resources listed below:

Service Mapping: A Step-by-Step Guide
(UK Government)
Designers in the United Kingdom have captured how they create maps of how government services operate. This step-by-step guide provides a walkthrough from determining what the map will do and look like, to completing the map and determining next steps.

What is a Customer Journey Map?
(U.S. General Services Administration)
Innovation teams in the federal government, within the General Services Administration, developed this three-part series describing how to create user-centered maps of how people journey through government services.

Journey Map and Service Blueprint
(Service Design Tools)
This design resource provides instructions, templates, and examples of how to use process maps to document users' journeys through the service process, or to map out how service providers deliver value.

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